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JAN. 17, 1922

# LETTER

OF THE

LIBRARIAN OF HARVARD COLLEGE,

TO

THE COMMITTEE

OF THE

ASSOCIATION OF THE ALUMNI

APPOINTED TO TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION

THE STATE OF THE COLLEGE LIBRARY,

IN ACCORDANCE WITH A VOTE OF THE ASSOCIATION PASSED  
AT THE ANNUAL MEETING,

JULY 16, 1857.

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CAMBRIDGE:  
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1859.

✓  
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Donations of books, pamphlets, or manuscripts for the public library of Harvard College, may be sent directly to the library, or may be left with either of the following gentlemen : —

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New York.

DR. HENRY WHEATLAND,  
21, Chestnut St.,  
Salem.

MALCOLM MACEUEN, Esq.,  
619, Walnut St.,  
Philadelphia.

REV. JOHN WEISS,  
9, Eighth St.,  
New Bedford.

NATHANIEL H. MORISON, Esq.,  
98, Madison St.,  
Baltimore.

JOHN D. WASHBURN, Esq.,  
6, Brinley Hall, Main St.,  
Worcester.

REV. MONCURE D. CONWAY,  
114, Hopkins St.,  
Cincinnati.

OSMOND TIFFANY, Esq.,  
Maple St., opposite Central St.,  
Springfield.

HENRY G. DENNY, Esq.  
42, Court St.,  
Boston.

Parcels for the library may also be left with F. W. Christern, 763, Broadway, New York, or at the office of BUCK'S Cambridge Express, 8, Court St., Boston.

## LETTER.

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*Harvard College Library,  
Cambridge, Mass., June 7th, 1858.*

HON. THOMAS G. CARY.

DEAR SIR: —

As several of the college officers will probably send you details in relation to the wants of their respective departments, it may not be necessary for me to do more than make general statements. . . . . The reputation of the college and of the country, and the good of the community, appeal powerfully to the friends of the university to furnish at least the materials and tools for making the standard of education the highest and best on the continent. . . . . To meet . . . . [the pressing demands upon the library of the college for the moral and intellectual culture of more than seven hundred students from all parts of the country, who are constantly going forth to take prominent positions in society,] the first object should be to provide, as far as practicable, the modern works in the different departments, as fast as they are published. And with nothing less than this ought the friends of the college to rest satisfied.

If it were possible, it would be desirable to go further. Various departments are deficient in rare old books and pamphlets, which are as important to thorough students as the modern. The library is not more used for reading than it is for literary, genealogical, historical, statistical, philological, philosophical, scientific, and other investigations. It is the



reservoir from which all minds at the university are mainly to be supplied. No limits can be set to its wants, as may sometimes be done with libraries got up for specific purposes. The field of intellectual labor is now so broad, and so carefully and extensively cultivated, that applications are made, not only by the officers and students, but by men of eminent literary attainments, for books, pamphlets, and papers, which by a superficial, one-sided inquirer would be considered worthless. Books which are seldom read are wanted to verify quotations. Biographers and historians ask for ephemeral pamphlets, newspapers, manuscript diaries and letters, relating to the times and persons of which they write. Macaulay cites old almanacs. Some American Hallam or Sismondi will want to examine the school-books of the last and present centuries, to obtain a general idea of their character and of the early education of the country. And where is a collection to be found? Nowhere. They have not been considered worth saving.

The student of mental and ethical philosophy, and the writer of the civil and ecclesiastical history of the country, want the newspapers and books issued by the different religious denominations, from the strong works of Edwards, down to the little Sunday-school primer and the catechism, which are implanting in the child's mind principles by which he will be governed when he becomes a man. The destruction of papers and pamphlets has been so great, and books are so scarce, that it has been said there are not, either in America or Europe, materials for writing a history of the New England Primer, — a little book which has exerted an inconceivable influence on the religious opinions and character, and remotely on the welfare and condition, of the nation. I think it doubtful if there is in existence even one copy of any of the very early editions.

Junk-dealers in the city, and tinmen in the country, collect wagon-loads of dead stock, old books, pamphlets, and papers, among which must be many of great rarity and value, and

sell them for a cent or two a pound to paper-makers, to be ground over and converted into paper-hangings. About a year ago I saw in Washington Street, in Boston, three large wagons, nearly filled with huge bags, just leaving a very humble auction-room; and from a few pamphlets which a man was stuffing into the last bag, I rescued one which for nearly eleven years I had been trying to find, to assist me in completing the volumes of a valuable periodical.

I have known a journey to be made from New York to Cambridge, in a storm in January, mainly for the purpose of consulting an old funeral sermon, of which another copy could not be found in the country. It had probably never before been asked for during the generations since it came to the library; but it was now wanted in a law case involving nearly half a million of dollars. How many would think a funeral sermon worth sending to the library of Harvard College?

From a remote part of Maine, journeys were repeatedly made to this vicinity for information respecting land claims and mill-privileges, and the parties found at last, by means of an old Boston Directory to which I called their attention, that for years they had probably been pursuing their inquiries on one of the most important points in the wrong direction. And yet the question is often asked, "Of what use is an old Boston Directory?"

A family in a neighboring city, on vacating a house, sent a valuable donation; but from an apprehension that a thorough gleaning had not been made, a messenger was despatched to the place, and he found in the barn, among papers which had been thrown there as worthless, several of the old, scarce Acts and Resolves of the state, other valuable documents, and a small unbound volume, of which fruitless efforts had been made to obtain a copy for the library.

From a closet where they had probably remained nearly a century, we recently received tolerably complete files of the Boston News Letter and of the Evening Post for the years

1742, 1743, and 1744, which contain a large amount of important information, nowhere else to be had, respecting Whitefield and the great revival, and the circumstances connected with the publication and statements of Prince's Christian History.

In a neat butter-firkin of literary remnants sent to the library at my special request, I found pamphlets, odd numbers of periodicals, enabling me to complete imperfect volumes, and a file of newspapers which made a perfect copy of the first volume of the Boston Gazette, beginning in the year 1755, an important period in the history of the American colonies.

More than once old barrels have been sent to the library, and though in some instances mice had been feasting on the literary treasures, and running riot among them, I always found something that was desirable.

I might multiply cases to show the value of what is commonly considered worthless, and to call your attention to the vast number and variety of the applications from officers and students, and from others who are drawn to the library by its reputation and their necessities. . . . . But on this point I may have already become tedious.

I think it would be well if it were generally known that there was never anything printed of which we should not be grateful for one copy. There are hundreds of persons who would be glad to get rid of what they call trash and rubbish. They would make not only their book-shelves, but their garrets, closets, old chests, trunks, and barrels empty their almanacs, sermons, newspapers, directories, reports, old books, manuscript letters and diaries, and pamphlets of every kind, into the lap of our Alma Mater. Among them we should find much that is valuable. Possibly we might get some things, of which not a copy is now known to be in existence. Authors, desirous of having their works accessible to the public, and preserved where they will be likely to be looked for and found by posterity, might be inclined to put in the

library a copy of each of their publications. Booksellers would find it for their interest to place here whatever they may print, for there are hundreds of readers to appreciate it and make it known. There are many instances where persons have bought for their own libraries, and for presentation to friends, books of which they obtained their first knowledge from the copies given to the college library. Many graduates might be prompted to give copies of all their writings, and, like the late Hon. Judge John Davis, also to make it a rule to send at least one good book to the library every year. If this were generally done by the alumni, with permission from the givers to exchange the duplicates, it would lead to important annual accessions. There may be persons interested in particular studies or pursuits, as poetry, political economy, ethics, American history, the drama, numismatics, Shakespeare, Milton, the reports and acts of some society or corporation, spiritualism, Mormonism, particular classes of sermons, of orations, of speeches, of periodicals, the Texan war, the Kansas difficulties, the reforms of the day, &c., &c., to whom it would be a pleasure to make the collections in their favorite departments as complete as possible, and place them where they would be minutely catalogued and carefully preserved. It is not incredible that some person of wealth, having a desire to contribute liberally to an important object, would bring a princely fortune to bear on the intellectual wants of the country, and, instead of rearing a pile of stones and mortar, which must sooner or later crumble down and disappear, would give a permanent fund, which for hundreds, and possibly for thousands of years, would be yielding an income that, as often as books were bought with it, would call to mind the wisdom which made so useful a disposition of wealth. In time the greater part of the volumes in the library would bear the benefactor's name in the shield of the seal. His memory would be called up perpetually and held in honor by the thousands who graduate, and by the scholars who from all parts of the country would be

obliged to resort to the literary treasures which his bounty had been the means of amassing, and which would give to the library celebrity, and make it a beacon to all literary and scientific men on the continent.

I might extend my remarks to other important topics. There is so much to be said, that it is difficult to determine where to begin and when to end. I would not overlook the enlightened munificence which has from time to time placed in our alcoves very rare and costly books and collections. There is an excellent foundation to build upon; but unless new works are added, the library, however valuable in any past time, must cease to command respect, and to exert the influence which it ought upon the university and the country. If the views which I have advanced exceed what by some persons are considered reasonable anticipations, I hope no one will be deterred from contributing whatever his inclinations and abilities may prompt, however small it may be, and however unimportant it may seem, remembering that not a book or pamphlet has ever been printed, of which it is not desirable to have one copy in the library.

I have the honor to be, respectfully, yours,

JOHN LANGDON SIBLEY, *Librarian.*

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